

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ☐ In Part ☒ In Full

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Classify as ☐ ☐ Extend as ☐ Downgrade to ☐Date ☐ Declassify on ☐ Reason ☐

AY026

DATE: December 7, 197

SUBJECT: Conversation with Captain Roberto J. Seisdedos: Part II

PARTICIPANTS: Captain Roberto J. Seisdedos, Human Rights Working Group
Counsel Juan Carlos Arlia, Human Rights Working Group
Mr. Charles W. Bray, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State
Mr. Wayne S. Smith, Political Counselor
Ms. Yvonne Thayer, Political Officer

PLACE: Foreign Ministry

COPIES TO: AMB, DCM, ARA-Mr. Bray

I opened the conversation by recalling our conversation of the night before. I suggested that what we should be considering at this point in our conversation was the practical problem of how to deal with what might become a serious irritant in the relations between our two countries. I noted that the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs had just indicated to me that (1) a list of those detained by the government and (2) measures against those responsible for excesses might be forthcoming by January. I said that this was very much to be hoped, since it would assist considerably in relieving some of their pre-occupations. I asked Captain Seisdedos if he could elaborate on the Undersecretary's statement.

Captain Seisdedos said that unfortunately he could not. He said they indeed hoped that such measures would be possible by January, but that the Undersecretary probably had information to which he was not yet privy. He noted that the Undersecretary had just returned from Mexico with Interior Minister Harguindegu, and since it is the latter who has blocked the issuance of a list of the detainees, it may be that the Undersecretary is aware of a change in attitude on the Interior Minister's part. Seisdedos reiterated the hope that such lists would be forthcoming and he also expressed the hope that the recently instituted courts martial system will speed up the processing of those detained.

I asked if the GOA planned to answer our Note protesting the treatment accorded Gwenda Mae Loken. Neither Captain Seisdedos, nor Arlia was certain. They believed her allegations were being investigated and that an answer might be prepared when the investigation had been completed.

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Ms. Thayer stated that it might help considerably if a list of detainees could be published. She noted that there have been few letters, or other expressions of concern, in the cases of those who have actually been charged and brought before the courts. It is those who are held incommunicado, or who have simply disappeared, who are the subjects of most of the correspondence received by the Embassy. Captain Seisdedos said this coincided with their own experience too. Mr. Arlia cut in to say that they frequently receive letters concerning those who had been tried, but usually this was in the case of those who had not been found guilty on grounds of insufficient evidence, and who therefore were frequently still detained. He repeated that if people are not carried on the books as being held under the State of Siege, or charged with some specific crime, then the government does not have them.

Mr. Smith asked what happens then to all those who simply disappear and on whom the government seems to have no record. Mr. Arlia replied that probably the great majority who disappear are terrorists who have gone underground and thus have dropped out of sight.

Captain Seisdedos said that speaking of lists, he had one of military personnel recently killed in the Federal Capital and Buenos Aires Province. It was a long list, and he noted with some bitterness that he did not recall a single voice of protest or concern raised on behalf of these men whose most fundamental human right--to live--had been extinguished by the terrorists.

I agreed that the terrorists were guilty of heinous crimes, but I repeated that the government itself is sworn to uphold the law. Its legitimacy is indeed based in part on its willingness to do so and it cannot be judged by the same standards as the terrorists. Captain Seisdedos agreed, but he argued that many of the allegations made against the Argentine Government are false. Frequently those released and expelled from the country claim they were tortured. He said he thought the best argument to refute the charges was to point out that the authorities were not so naive as to torture people and then let them go. He recalled that Patricia Erb had of her own free will written and signed a document describing her experience and incarceration in which she had said she had not been mistreated. Further, he said the Argentine Government had released Gwenda Mae Loken in good faith even though they had no doubts concerning her involvement in subversion. They had expelled her as an indication of the value they place on their relations with the U. S., but they had never dreamed she would make the statement she did after her return to the United States. He stated that the responsible officers in the government would have to think very carefully in the future as to the advisability of expelling such people.

Captain Seisdedos emphasized, however, that the Human Rights Working Group had been cooperating closely with the Embassy until now, and would continue to do so. They would do everything they possibly could to satisfy U. S.

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expressions of concern with respect to human rights, but that if their best was not enough, the U. S. simply would have to keep its military assistance.

Mr. Arlia then remarked that Father Drinan's conduct in his first meeting at the Foreign Ministry, during which he made threats against the GOA, suggested that the U. S. might be going back to a big stick policy. He asked if this was the case. I said that it was not, but emphasized that Congressman Drinan was expressing the legitimate concerns of his constituents and of the American people as a whole.

Captain Seisdedos concluded by reiterating that this is a "dirty fight," but he emphasized it is not a war. He would never define it as a war because that might suggest the subversive delinquents were belligerents. They were not; they were criminal and did not have the rights of belligerents, and would not be accorded such rights.

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